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AUTHOR Benninga, Jacques S.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between several teacher attitudes and students' perceptions of the teaching milieu. To assess these relationships, measures of teachers' attitudes, teachers' perceptions of their own teaching and children's evaluations of the instruction were used. Five instruments were used to measure the attitudes of 42 first, second and third grades teachers: The F-Scale (anti-democratic tendencies), the Attitudes Towards the Freedom of Children Scale, the Teaching Self-Concept Scale, the Affect Towards Teaching Scale, and the Perception of Causation Scale (locus of control). The students sample included 378 first graders, 405 second graders, and 365 third graders. Each student was administered the Student Evaluation of Teaching II (Set II). Full results were obtained from 23 of the 42 teachers. Analysis of these results show the following: (1) teachers' perceptions of causation, their affect towards teaching, their attitude towards the freedom of children and their anti-democratic tendencies (F-Scale scores) were all in a direction consistent with expected scores. That is, the more responsibility teachers assume for the learning of their students, the more they like teaching, the more freedom they feel children should have and the more democratic their values tend to be. (2) All of the above measures were found to be inversely related to the self-concept measure. That is, the more confident teachers (high teaching self-concept) felt less responsibility, liked teaching less, felt more restrictive in regard to children's freedom and tended to be more authoritarian. (3) The grade level at which a teacher teaches (within this narrow range) had little effect upon student's ratings of the teacher. In regard to years of teaching experience, again there is little difference between the groups. (4) Male students consistently rated their teachers more positively than did the female students. (Author/MP)

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# SELECTED ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTION AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL

Jacques S. Benninga, Ph.D.
Kathy R. Thornburg, Ph.D.
Thomas R. Guskey, Ph.D.

University of Kentucky
College of Education
Lexington, KY U.S.A.

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ABSTRACT

Forty-two (42) classroom units, including all of the first, second and third grades in a small urban school district were studied. Teachers' experience ranged from one to more than thirty years with a mean of 8.3 years. The study emphasized the relationship of several teacher personality characteristics to the students' perception of teachers. Teacher attitudes were measured by the following instruments: The F-Scale, the Attitude Towards the Freedom of Children Scale, the Teaching Self-Concept Scale, the Affect Towards Teaching Scale, and the Perception of Causation Scale (locus of control). The student sample included 378 first graders, 405 second graders, and 365 third graders, 606 boys and 542 girls. Each student was administered the Student Evaluation of Teaching II (SET II).

Full results were obtained from 23 of the 42 teachers, therefore, both student and teacher data were analyzed in 23 of the 42 classes in the sample. Although few of the correlations relating to teacher characteristics and student perceptions of instruction were significant, several important tendencies were apparent.

1. Teachers' perceptions of causation, their affect towards teaching, their attitude towards the freedom of children and their anti-democratic tendencies (F-Scale scores) were all in a direction consistent with expected scores. That is, the more responsibility teachers assume for the learning of their students, the more they like teaching, the more freedom they feel children should have and the more democratic their values tend to be.

2. All of the above measures were found to be inversely related to the self-concept measure. That is, the more confident teachers (high teaching self-concept) felt less responsibility, liked teaching less, felt more

restrictive in regard to children's freedom and tended to be more authoritarian.

3. The grade level at which a teacher teaches (within this narrow range) had little effect upon student's ratings of the teacher. In regard to years of teaching experience, again there is little difference between the groups.

4. Male students consistently rated their teachers more positively than did the female students.

SELECTED ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS AND
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In 1970, Flanders stressed that "teaching behavior is the most potent, single, controllable factor that can alter learning opportunities in the classroom" (Flanders, 1970, p. 13). Since that time a growing number of educational studies have shown that teaching behavior is indeed an important variable in classroom research. However, these studies have also shown that the distinction between teaching behaviors and the attitudes and perceptions of teachers is not a clear one. For example, many of the labels associated with behavioral characteristics -e.g., honest, aggressive, authoritarian, destructive, democratic, etc.- are the same labels used to describe teachers' attitudes and personalities. There appears to be no general agreement in this regard as to whether changes in behavior lead to attitudinal changes or if changes in attitudes lead to behavioral change. It is generally agreed, however, that attitudinal or behavioral change is most often evident among those individuals who sense some reason for such change. If the attitudes and behaviors of teachers stem from the role they have defined for themselves as teachers (Brophy and Good, 1974, p. 130), it seems plausable that clarification or redefinition of that role might lead to particular attitudinal or behavioral changes.

The one common element which runs through summaries of research on teacher effectiveness seems to be its inconsistency. The Rand Corporation report (Averch, et.al., 1972) for instance, summarized this research by concluding that "...research has found nothing that consistently and unambiguously makes a difference in students' outcomes." At the same time, certain trends do seem to be apparent. Ryans (1964), found that teachers

receiving high observer assessments on his three major patterns of teacher classroom behavior (i.e., warm vs. aloof; responsive vs. evading; stimulating vs. dull) could be clearly distinguished from those teachers receiving low observer assessments. The high group was (a) more favorable in its opinions of students, (b) more prone to democratic classroom procedures, and (c) represented by a mean inventory response suggesting superior emotional adjustment (p. 88). Weber (1971), focusing on the characteristics of four inner-city schools in which reading achievement was above the national norm, found that among other characteristics, teachers in all four schools had 'high expectations' for all of their students. Similarly, a study by Brookover and Lezotte (1977) emphasized the importance of teacher attitudes in relation to school achievement. This research was conducted in schools identified by the Michigan Department of Education as showing either academic improvement or academic decline. Based upon interviews and questionnaires with the respective faculties, the following discrepancies were found:

> a. There is a clear contrast in the evaluations that teachers and principals make of the students in the improving and declining schools. The staffs of the improving schools tend to believe that all of their students can master the basic objectives; and furthermore, the teachers perceive that the principal shares this belief. They tend to report higher and increasing levels of student ability, while the declining school teachers project the belief that students' ability levels are low, and therefore, they cannot master even these objectives.
>
> b. The staff members of the improving schools hold decidedly higher and apparently increasing levels of expectations with regard to the educational accomplishments of their students. In contrast, staff members of the declining schools are much less likely to believe that their students will complete high school or college.
>
> c. In contrast to the declining schools, the teachers and principals of the improving schools are much more likely to assume responsibility for teaching the basic reading and math skills and are much more committed to doing so. The staffs of the declining schools feel there is not much that teachers can do to influence the achievement of their students. They tend to displace the responsibility for skill learning on the parents or the students themselves.

d. Since the teachers in the declining schools believe that there is little they can do to influence basic skill learning, it follows they spend less time in direct reading instruction than do teachers in the improving schools. With the greater emphasis on reading and math objectives in the improving schools, the staffs in these schools devote a much greater amount of time toward achieving reading and math objectives.

e. Generally, teachers in the improving schools are less satisfied than the staffs in the declining schools. The higher levels of reported staff satisfaction and morale in the declining schools seem to reflect a pattern of complacency and satisfaction with the current levels of educational attainment. On the other hand, the improving school staff members appear more likely to experience some tension and dissatisfaction with the existing condition. (pp. 79-82)

While it is apparent that home and family background, racial-ethnic group membership, certain motivational factors (Mayeske et al, 1973) and teacher behavior (Dunkin and Biddle, 1974) are predictive of academic school success, the attitudes that teachers exhibit in their interactions with their students should not be overlooked. According to Brophy and Good (1974),

> ...attitudes can affect teacher-student interaction in much the same way that teacher expectations can. That is, once a teacher forms a particular attitude toward an individual student, the teacher is likely to begin to treat this student in individualized ways. Attitudes, like expectations, will be communicated. A student whom the teacher particularly likes will probably know it, and so will his classmates. The same goes for a student whom the teacher dislikes. This knowledge is likely to affect the responses of the students to the teacher, probably causing them to behave in ways that will reinforce the teacher's attitudes. Thus, students the teachers will like will probably begin to behave in ways that will make the teacher like them even more, while rejected students will probably begin to respond in ways that will increase the teacher's degree of rejection (p. 130).

With this argument in mind, the logical next question is whether young children can indeed accurately perceive and evaluate the attitudinal differences in teachers. Little evidence exists relative to this question. While it has been shown that students in the middle grades and in high school can discriminate between their teachers (Symonds, 1955; Amatora, 1952; Tuckman and Oliver, 1968), young children appear to be less able to do so (McDonald, 1972, as reported in Brophy and Good, 1974; Pittman, 1952; Davis and Slobodian, 1967).

In a recent effort, however, after reviewing a large body of research related to student evaluations of instruction, Haak, Kleiber and Peck (1972) conclude that a case can be argued "...at least tenatively (for) the reasonableness of assessing teacher behavior by obtaining young students' perceptions of it..." (p. 13). These authors found a 'remarkable degree of agreement' in the literature suggesting that,

> The warm and friendly teacher who is rated as superior by the students is a mature adult whose focus is outwardly directed toward the children and, furthermore, a person who views the children in a very positive and generous kind of light. The poor teacher appears to be thoroughly ego-centric, concerned with herself, interpreting the students' actions as personally directed toward her own discomfort, and disposed to impugn the motives of others (p. 29).

As a result of their review Haak, Kleiber and Peck felt that sufficient evidence did exist to warrant the development of a group instrument to measure student ratings of teachers at the lower primary level.

The present research is a further attempt to delineate the interaction between certain teacher attitudes and student perceptions of teaching. Our aim was to generate a profile of teacher attitudes and perceptions a la Ryans (1964). This profile was based on teacher responses to five questionnaires and certain demographic information (grade level taught and years of teaching experience). In addition, students evaluated their teachers along four dimensions: rapport with students, interactional competence, unreasonable negativity and fosterance of self-esteem.

It was hypothesized that student evaluations would be more positive for those teachers who felt a greater responsibility for and committment to student outcomes.

Method

Subjects. A total of 42 classroom units, including all of the first, second, and third grades in school district adjacent to a large metropolitan

area were selected for the study. The majority of parents of the children attending the sampled schools were either connected with one of several colleges and universities in the area or worked at other skilled or professional jobs. They would be considered solidly middle class. Teachers sampled from this district (all of the first, second, and third grade teachers) had experience in the classroom ranging from one to over thirty years with a mean of 8.3 years. Forty of the teachers were female and all were white.

All of the children in attendance on the testing dates were sampled. Included from the three elementary schools in the district were 378 first graders, 405 second graders and 365 third graders, for a total of 1148 primary-level children. There were 606 boys and 541 girls. Testing was completed at the end of October, approximately two and one-half months after the beginning of the school year.

Design. The study emphasized the relationship of several teacher attitudes to the students' perceptions of the teaching milieu. To assess these relationships, measures of teachers' attitudes, teachers' perceptions of their own teaching and childrens' evaluations of the instruction were used. The latter measure was designated the dependent variable. Independent variables (measures of teacher attitudes and perceptions of teaching) included measures of authoritarianism, control, teaching self concept, perception of causation and affect toward teaching. Nineteen of the 42 teachers did not complete the biographical information requested, thus, while information was collected on all teachers and their classrooms, complete information regarding the relationship of teacher attitudes to student perceptions was available for only 23 teachers and their classrooms.

Instrumentation. Independent variables. All of the independent variables were measured by self-report questionnaires which were individually distributed to each teacher. The authors collected the completed questionnaires several days after dissemination.

The first teacher attitude measure was obtained using the F-Scale, Forms 45 and 40, developed by Adorno, et al (1950). The F-Scale is designed to measure individual prejudices and anti-democratic tendencies. This scale was originally developed in an effort to identify the attitudes which would describe an acceptance of authoritarian beliefs. Scale items relate to tendencies toward belief in such attitudes as conventionalism, authoritarian submission, superstition, power, destructiveness and projectivity. A higher score on the F-Scale indicates a greater authoritarian tendency.

The second teachers' attitude measure was the Attitude Toward the Freedom of Children Scale (Shaw and Wright; 1967). This scale contains 33 statements concerning children's rights and liberties. Scores on the scale are determined from the median scale values of items with which the subject agrees. A higher score on this scale indicates a greater need to control children's behavior, whereas a lower score indicates a more laissez-faire, child-centered attitude in dealing with children.

Three perceptual measures on teachers were obtained through the use of instruments developed in the research of Guskey (1979). The first of these instruments was designed to measure how confident teachers are of themselves, or their teaching self-concept. This questionnaire consisted of 30 Likert-type, rating scale items. Most of these items were adapted from behaviorally based items for assessing self-concept developed by Brookover (1973) and Dolan (1979). Each item asked the teacher to rate herself in

relation to particular behaviors or characteristics. Five options were available for the rating: superior, good, average, below average, or poor. An example of an item would be: "Most students learn well what I set out to teach." Each teacher would then assign herself a rating on this item from superior to poor.

A second perceptual questionnaire was designed to measure teachers' affect toward teaching. This section also consisted of 30 Likert-type rating scale items. These items were derived from two sources. Several items were adapted from those developed by Dolan (1979) for assessing affect toward school. The majority of the items, however, were adapted from items contained in the Self Observational Scales (SOS) for students, an instrument developed by Katzenmeyer and Stenner (1974) of the National Testing Service. The items adapted for the questionnaire were from the SOS scales which assessed school affiliation and teacher affiliation. Each of the items in the affect toward teaching questionnaire asked the teacher to indicate her feelings in regard to particular statements. Again there were five options available for the rating: strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, or strongly disagree. Statements were both positive and negative. An example of a positive item would be: "I enjoy learning about new classroom techniques." A negative item would be: "I often get bored in discussions about education."

The final perceptual questionnaire was designed to measure the perceptions of causation of teachers. This questionnaire consisted of 30 forced-choice type items in which teachers were asked to assign weights to both of the two options. These weights were to be assigned according to the feelings or preferences of the teacher. The weights assigned to both options were to

total "100" in all cases; in other words, a simple percentage divided between the two options. Items contained in this section were derived from items on the Achievement Responsibility Scale for students, developed by Crandall, Katkovsky & Crandall (1965). These items were again both positive and negative, assessing perceptions of the causes of academic success and perceptions of the causes of academic failure. An example of a positive item from this section of the questionnaire would be: "If a child does well in your class, would it probably be (a) because he had the natural ability to do well, or (b) because of the encouragement you offered?" For this item, the greater the weight a teacher assigns to option (b) over option (a), the greater the measure of internality of responsibility (locus of control) for academic achievement, and the greater the measure of alterability of cause for the teacher.

Dependent Variable. The children's perception of teachers were obtained by using the Student Evaluation of Teaching II (SET II), a group measure developed by Haak, Kleiber and Peck (1972). This instrument contained a series of 23 statements, on cards, individually packaged for each child. Each child was then asked to determine if the statements were "about your teacher" or "not about your teacher" by sorting the cards into one of two separate folders. The scoring divided the statements into three major factors: stimulating interaction style, classroom climate (unreasonable negativity), and fosterance of self-esteem.

Results

Our first step in analyzing the data was to calculate the scale score means and standard deviations for each of the teacher and student variables. These are shown in Table 1. Since the teacher was the

appropriate analytical unit in this first part of our analysis, scores on the three dependent variables represent the average teacher ratings by students on these variables.

Table 2 shows the intercorrelations between measures of the teacher variables. Several of these correlations were statistically significant. In addition, the direction of the interrelationships between several of these variables indicates a number of interesting tendencies.

Teachers' perceptions of causation, affect toward teaching, freedom of children measures, and F-Scale measures were all in a direction consistent with expected trends. That is, the more responsibility teachers assume for the learning of their students, the more they like teaching, the more freedom they feel children should have, and the more democratic their values tend to be. However, all of these measures are inversely related to self-concept measures. In other words, the more confident teachers appear to feel less responsibility, like teaching less, feel more restrictive in regard to childrens' freedom, and tend to be more authoritarian.

The next step in the analysis was to look at mean scores in measures of the student variables across various groupings of teachers. The sample of 23 teachers for whom student data could be analyzed was subdivided, first with respect to teaching grade level, and second, with respect to number of years of teaching experience. This data indicated that the grade level at which a teacher teaches (within this narrow range) had little effect upon students' ratings of the teacher. Grade 1 teachers do, however, tend to receive consistently more positive ratings than do Grade 3 teachers. In regard to years of teaching experience, again there was little difference between the groups. There was however, a tendency for less experienced

teachers to receive more positive ratings from their students than did teachers with many years of experience.

Finally, we looked at the means of scores given teachers by students of different sexes. Male students consistently rated their teachers more positively than did female students, but again this difference was not statistically significant.

Discussion

Several generalizations may be drawn from these results. First, as teachers feel more responsibility for student learning (perception of causation) their affect-towards-teaching score increases but their teaching self-concept score decreases significantly. These teachers view their interactions with children as being more permissive and democratic. When, on the other hand, teachers feel they are not responsible for the learning of their students, an opposite effect appears to take place. That is, teachers who view themselves as not responsible for student learning (i.e., who feel that learning is more determined by factors external to the teacher), apparently tend to assign importance to other aspects of the school program. When the teacher cannot assume major responsibility for student progress, the tendency to control behavior seems to become more dominant. A teacher with these characteristics is therefore likely to construct an environment allowing for less freedom. By necessity she becomes more authoritarian.

These results can be interpreted as both a corroboration and extension of Brookover and Lezotte's study (1977). Those teachers who feel that learning is determined by factors external to themselves would tend (with little provocation) to hold lower expectations for and consequently spend less time in direct instruction with their students. These teachers would not

like teaching but would, at the same time, feel confident about their teaching abilities. The less confident teacher is the one who feels responsibility for student outcomes, yet is never quite confident that she is doing all she can for each student. Consequently, she would have a lower teaching self-concept. We can speculate that this teacher is the one who constantly searches for new ideas and strategies which may prove to be more successful with individual students.

Future research should examine these trends. It may be that if teachers are given a consistent philosophical and theoretical perspective from which to view children, and subsequent teaching strategies relating directly to this core framework, their perceptions of causation may change towards the acceptance of more internal responsibility for student learning. We could then expect that teachers would like teaching more and be more involved in meeting individual needs. Such diverse approaches as DISTAR, Mastery Learning and Montessori are attempts in this direction.

Secondly, first, second and third grade students all rated their teachers positively. First graders did tend to rate their teachers more highly than did third graders. A developmental interpretation may help clarify this tendency. Young, preoperational children tend to be egocentric. Interpreted from a social perspective, young children, because of their egocentricity, tend to have unilateral respect for authority figures (see, for example, Piaget's Moral Judgment of the Child, 1965). Thus the youngest children would interpret almost any action of the authority as the correct action, and therefore teacher ratings would be high. As children develop, this social orientation changes from one of unilateral respect to one of cooperation. Cooperation implies the gratification of needs on both sides.

Thus, as children mature, one could expect them to become more discriminating in the evaluation of their teachers. Given the wide discrepancy in personality types found in this study and the uniformity of student evaluations, the foregoing explanation seems justifiable, especially in light of recent research (Etaugh and Harlow, 1975; Lee and Wolinsky, 1973; Brophy and Good, 1974) that teachers tend to be more disapproving of male students. In the present study, by contrast, male students tended to rate their teachers slightly higher than did females.

The results of this study, while preliminary, suggest that certain teacher characteristics may be predictive of classroom climate. The data suggest that the more confident teacher is the teacher who feels less responsibility for student learning and that students at the primary level do not discriminate well between personality types on a group administered test.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Teacher and Student Variables

| Variable | N | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perceptions of Causation | 42 | 49.62 | 3.20 |
| Affect Toward Teaching | 42 | 52.13 | 5.10 |
| Teaching Self-Concept | 42 | 95.88 | 4.77 |
| Freedom of Children | 42 | 6.03 | .70 |
| F-Scale | 37 | 3.52 | .78 |
| Interaction Style | 23 | 10.21 | .54 |
| Negativity | 23 | 8.73 | .50 |
| Fostering Self-Esteem | 23 | 7.09 | .37 |

Table 2

Correlations Between Selected Teacher Variables

(corrected for attenuation)

(N = 42)

| | Perceptions of Causation | Affect Toward Teaching | Teaching Self-Concept | Freedom of Children | F-Scale |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceptions of Causation (r = .857) | 1.000 | | | | |
| Affect Toward Teaching (r = .757) | .202 | 1.000 | | | |
| Teaching Self-Concept (r = .943) | -.333* | .017 | 1.000 | | |
| Freedom of Children (r = .97) | .217 | -.323* | .210 | 1.000 | |
| F-Scale | -.113 | -.237 | .287 | .190 | 1.000 |

*p < .05